

INCORPORATING CULTURE IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH TEXTBOOK THROUGH THEME-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract: It is a common belief that language and culture are closely related. Language used in certain society reflects the values shared by the people in that society. Culture is therefore a key component in language teaching. When people learn a foreign language, they will inevitably learn the culture of the target language. It is proved by the result of review in this paper that culture and language are inseparable in foreign language teaching. Moreover, this paper argues that culture introduction is an effective way to promote students' cultural awareness and language proficiency. The result of the related review also indicates that an attempt is required to relate culture into teaching and learning process. Then, English textbooks as the major source for the students in learning English is important media in incorporating culture component into teaching and learning English. One of the approaches deals with incorporating culture in English textbook is by using theme-based approach in which it enables all the components of the English language curriculum listening, speaking, reading, writing, drama, vocabulary, grammar and so on to be logically linked, integrated, and thus inter-supportive. A review of additional studies demonstrated both local and target culture introduction can be achieved through theme-based approach in developing English textbook. The purpose of this critical review is to give elaborated insight in incorporating culture in developing textbook.

Keywords: *culture, english textbook, theme-based approach*

This critical review paper aims to examine the importance of incorporating cultural element in teaching English as foreign language especially culture introduction embedded in foreign language textbooks. The analysis of Zu and Kong in their Canadian Center of Science and Education Journal (Vol. 2, No. 1, March 2009) is used as the major reference. Zu and Kong tried to analyze the main approaches to culture introduction in foreign language textbooks entitled *Learning English* which is used in teaching English as foreign language in China. They emphasized the importance of incorporating culture in teaching and learning process. Further, they pointed out that Language teachers in this global age should realize that they are responsible for helping students to communicate cross-culturally. However, they also reminded that despite integrating the target culture in ELT, the local-culture should not be neglected, so as to make students proud of their own culture yet aware of the cultural differences that exist between their home and target culture. Based on their study, they found that there were two approaches dealing with culture introduction in English textbook, namely: direct and indirect introduction. Therefore, in developing material especially textbook for foreign language learner textbook writer can lead a way by incorporating culture awareness raising material and use the approaches as Zu and Kong have been found in their study.

This critical review paper initially discusses the finding of Zu and Kong's concern about the inseparable between culture and language in learning foreign language. It then briefly presents crucial role of English textbook as means of introducing culture. Next, the finding of Zu and Kong's study about two approaches in incorporating culture in textbook is tried to be discussed clearly. In this case, theme-based approach is used to support their study.

Textbooks and Culture

As we can see from the fact above majority of language teacher and learner make aware of the significant role of culture in teaching and learning foreign language; however, they are still in need of appropriate cultural materials that could provide a comprehensive picture of cultural knowledge required to conduct communication fluency and accurately. Abdullah and Kumari (2006) stated that a textbook can be a major source of cultural elements besides providing linguistic and topical contents which necessarily reflect the ideology inherent in the ESL context of a particular circle. Textbooks across the world are of different cultural orientations; whether they are based on source cultures, target culture or international target cultures. Source cultures refer to learners' own culture, target culture is the culture in which the target language is used as a first language while international target cultures refer to various cultures in English, or non-English-speaking countries which use English as an international language.

According to the finding of analysis of a set of English textbook, Zu and Kong found that there some cultural features that should be included in English textbook for EFL. First, the textbook should present a wider

range of cultural topic. The different topic is presented in each unit of the book with concerning with the western culture, or at least a reflection of them which are certain to be of interest to learners and at students' level. The topic can be about everyday life, leisure, family relationship, social custom, hot issues of contemporary society, etc. moreover, they can provide opportunities for expanding students' experience in general. Second, the textbook should offer various activities or tasks in each topic to be discussed since it provides a great deal of opportunities for the students to become aware of values, pattern of culture. The activities include pair-work, group discussion, role play, interviewing, etc.

Effective English Textbook

It is important to examine about the effective English textbook containing cultural element to reveal whether the result of Zu and Kong study on cultural characteristics of English textbook are strong finding. In his article, Crawford (2002) stated that effective textbooks are likely to reflect the following characteristics. First, textbook must contextualize the language the present. It means that language whether it is input or learner output should emerge from the context in which it occurs. Therefore, the book writer must provide meaningful and familiar context in textbook materials for the learner to help them use language as media of communication. Second, the materials should emphasize the purposeful use of language without ignoring the important of form of language. Third, the materials need to be authentic and realistic rather than contrived and artificial language materials. The more realistic the language, the more easily it can cater to the range of proficiency levels found in many classes. Then, materials need to be flexible enough to cater to individual and contextual differences. The next characteristic is that material should engage learner both affective and cognitively. It means that the input from the materials provides linguistic and cultural preparation before or in parallel with the learner-generated language which is the ultimate goal of the learning process.

From the examination about the characteristic of effective teaching materials proposed by Crawford (2002), it can be seen that cultural characteristics of English textbook which Zu and Kong have been studied are in line with Crawford's statements.

Approaches to Culture Introduction in English Textbook

According to Zu and Kong, there are mainly two approaches to the introduction of culture, that is, the direct and indirect introduction. By direct introduction, the textbook provides students with materials concerning cultural aspect of language in a clear and unambiguous manner in the form of cultural knowledge. In other words, it enables students to obtain cultural knowledge from the content of textbook in a direct way. The examples of direct introduction include words accompanied by pictures, situational dialogue, texts depicting cultural event, and cultural notes. However, this approach has limitation in that communicative competence is very limited with this kind of information provided directly by the textbook. As the result, the learners are not able to use the real and actual communication.

The other approach is indirect introduction in which culture is presented in an implicit way. This approach focuses on both in cognitive and affective or behavioural factor of the learner. Cognitive factor means the mental process in which students learn to think or to do things by virtue of the target language. Some typical cognitive activities are writing something about home culture, making contrast and comparison, cultural quizzes, searching for cultural information, discussion, and brainstorming. Meanwhile, in affective or behavioural factor, there are many activities or task that can facilitate the learner to perceive the different between home culture and the target culture. While conducting the tasks, students are actually learning to behave in a new situation and to empathize with the target language community. These activities include role-play, song-singing, experimentation and the like. In the case of approaches, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) in Baker (2003) proposed a range of tasks such as class discussions, research and role-plays using materials drawn from English speaking countries that promote discussions, comparisons and reflection on English culture and the learners own culture.

Zu and Kong's study and Comments

Zu and Kong's study attempted to analyze one set of English textbook for Chinese secondary school students and tried to analyze approaches to culture introduction in English textbook.

However, the study of Zu and Kong is a very small scale study with just one textbook as the subject of the study. Therefore it is not the intent of this study to generalize its findings. The scope of the study is only confined to the analysis of written text. It does not consider illustrations and other visuals, tapescripts of listening texts, sound recordings, realia and pseudo-realialia of all sorts. In addition, there is no clear explanation of research methodology and also procedures of the research so that we don't know what kind of criteria to be used to analyze the book.

Furthermore, it is necessary to examine other studies on incorporating both local culture and target culture presented in textbook to support Zu and Kong's finding. As Zu and Kong argued that it is of necessity

that the book writers incorporate both the home culture or local culture and the target culture material into English textbook in the hope that learners understand both culture and the target culture.

The Rational for a Theme-based Approach

Davis (1996) argued that a prime consideration in opting for the thematic approach is that it eases the controversy over the context of English teaching. If, by teaching English, we are spreading a 'western' culture model which confuses our pupils' traditional value-patterns and encourages false hopes and expectations which cannot be met when they leave school, then we may be doing irreparable harm to them and to their society. In fact, English as an international language can be used to reflect and describe from within any culture in which it is regularly used.

Based on the explanation above, theme based approach provides an alternative what otherwise be traditional language material presented in English textbook by structuring the cultural materials around themes or topic. Brown (2001) stated that challenging in English textbook with theme-based approach engage the curiosity and increase motivation of students as they grapple with an array of real life issues from simple to complex and also improve their linguistic skills.

Davis (1996) made summary of the advantages of theme-based approach in incorporating culture in English textbook. First, which it enables all the components of the English language curriculum listening, speaking, reading, writing, drama, vocabulary, grammar and so on to be logically linked, integrated, and thus inter-supportive. Next, within a topic, there may well be opportunity for project work, for drama, for creative presentation, which normal textbook chapter rarely caters for, and which we often relegate to sphere of extra-curricular activities. Finally, the macro-skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing will never be employed in isolation in a theme-based lesson sequence, but will inter-relate in multi-skill activities.

To sum up, theme-based approach can help to incorporate culture and language in English textbook as Zu and Kong argued that both local and target culture are important in English language teaching and learning. Theme-based approach gives the opportunity to learn about a whole host of topics of cultural significance to learners and thus provides excellent materials for equipping them to be able to talk about their own culture and target culture in English to other people.

This article has discussed Zu and Kong's concern about the importance of incorporating culture in English textbook to make learners be aware of culture awareness both local and target culture. The English textbook should have cultural characteristics whether they are presented in direct or indirect way. Presenting suitable cultural content is very crucial in incorporating culture in English textbook since it can lead to oversimplification and stereotypes of cultural characteristics if it does not present properly. Theme based approach can provide a solution of the problem since it structures the cultural materials around theme or topic based on students need and interest. Therefore, it also presents both local and target culture value in which students need to be used to understand diverse community around them. Recent studies also show that both local and target culture are very important in teaching and learning a language. Thus, the book writer should incorporate cultural awareness in the textbook materials using theme based approach.

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